

Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez
Testimony on HR 6177 – Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River
National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee Hearing
Thursday July 10, 2008

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on behalf of HR 6177, the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River Extension Act of 2008. My name is Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez, I represent the 23rd District of Texas which runs from San Antonio Texas west to El Paso County.

My Congressional District has many beautiful and diverse National Park Units. We boast more than half of all the National Park units in Texas. My testimony today is in regards to the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River. In 1978 a 196-mile section of the Rio Grande River in Texas was designated by Congress as a Wild and Scenic River. The legislation that I have introduced would extend the designation of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River approximately 50 miles east from the current eastern boundary of the Wild and Scenic River to the boundary of the Big Bend National Park. All of the land along this extension lies within National Park Service land.

The portion of the Rio Grande that lies within the proposed extension is a heavily visited segment of the river and the inclusion within the Wild and Scenic River designation will increase tourism for the River, Big Bend National Park as well as the surrounding communities. It is also important to support the preservation and conservation of this scenic area with colorful wildlife and diverse geology.

Currently the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River designation includes approximately 78 miles of public land and approximately 118 miles of private land downstream of the Big Bend National Park. Current law states that where the public land within the designation is 50 % or greater condemnation for fee title purchase of private lands is prohibited. This legislation would change the existing ratio which will place the public land within the designation over 50 percent, removing the threat of condemnation for land-owners along

the river in Terrell and Brewster Counties. This has been a concern for the landowners whose land currently is within the designation.

In short, this legislation is extremely beneficial for a many parties including land owners, communities, tourists and the over all economic development of the region.

Thank you for inviting me to testify on this legislation for the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River. I believe this legislation will be an important step for preserving our River and encouraging tourism to this beautiful part of the 23rd District of Texas.